

LACDMH CELEBRATES AVALON APARTMENTS OPENING

By Kathleen Piché, L.C.S.W., Public Affairs Director



On April 2, 2015, LACDMH joined A Community of Friends (ACOF), and multiple service and funding partners to commemorate the official opening of Avalon apartments, partly funded by the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA).

Dora Leong Gallo, CEO, ACOF, welcomed the crowd of dignitaries, providers and residents, noting that it was through seed money from the Department of Mental Health that helped start ACOF over 20 years ago. With the creation of ACOF, the agency has developed 41 permanent supportive housing developments for those with mental illness in LA County and other California counties.

Dora introduced L.A. County Board Supervisor Mark Ridley Thomas, Second District, who led the crowd in repeating "Permanent supportive housing works," emphasizing the effectiveness of the housing-first model and urging attendees to play a part in ending homelessness in Los Angeles County.



Dora then introduced Ray Brewer from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D.), and Marvin Southard, D.S.W., LACDMH Director.

Dr. Southard reinforced Supervisor Ridley-Thomas' mantra that permanent supportive housing works and pointed out that the LACDMH Housing Program has created over 2,000 permanent supportive housing units with MHSA funds in LA County, over half of all such units built in California. Dr. Southard noted that vision and partnership are key ingredients in making such huge strides in providing local housing for those without a home and with a mental health diagnosis. He quoted Malcolm Gladwell's *David and Goliath*, stating, "Wounds that communities suffer sometimes become their greatest strengths."



Other speakers included: Sean Rogan, Executive Director for the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles (HACoLA); Debbie Burkart, National Equity Fund; Clifford Sheipe, To Help Everyone (T.H.E.) Health and Wellness Centers; Jasmine Roach, Avalon resident; and John Griffith, Ph.D., President/CEO of Kedren Community Health Center. Dr. Griffith remarked on the attractive, spacious new units, "When I arrived here today, they said there were two units left, so I put my name on the list."

Avalon apartments is a 55-unit supportive housing development located in unincorporated Los Angeles, now a home for 37 individuals and families who have been homeless and have been diagnosed with a mental illness. The three-story structure features five (5) accessible units for MHSA eligible tenants with physical and/or visual/hearing disabilities. All other units are adaptable if additional accessible units are needed. The development includes 13 one-bedroom units, 22 two-bedroom units, and 20 three-bedroom units.

Avalon Apartments provides supportive services to all special needs tenants, with the goal to improve day-to-day living and housing stability. Service partners include Kedren Community Health Center and T.H.E. Health and Wellness Centers.



Arthur Bluford, resident, became homeless when his mother died. He lived on the street at 88th and Avalon for six years but did not lose the hope that things could change. One day he dialed 211, was referred to Kedren Community Health Center and was enrolled in a Full Service Partnership (FSP) program. Arthur's depression improved and he could not believe he was first in line for a home at Avalon. When asked how having a permanent home with integrated services at the residence affected him, he stated, "I'm able to be me. People here are like family. I'm blessed."

The 20.6 million dollar housing project received capital development funding from LACDMH via MHSA dollars, HACoLA and the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee/Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Rental subsidies are provided through the HACoLA Shelter Plus Care and project based Section 8 programs. The John Stewart Company manages the property and the project architect was KDG Design.



Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) recognizes and prioritizes the need to provide permanent supportive housing and on-site supportive services for homeless tenants with mental health disabilities. The services provide an enriched living experience for tenants to improve and maintain physical and mental health, gain increased independence, reduce homelessness and live in a safe and secure housing environment. These 'wrap around' services are provided in partnership with LACDMH and local non-profit organizations to increase self-sufficiency, develop independent living skills and promote an interactive and vibrant living community. Services are also designed to promote recovery, wellness and resiliency.